Metropolitan Regions, Historic Cities and Heritage: the Case of the United Kingdom

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Abstract

In recent decades in the UK, conservation objectives have been important in place-making in many different types of settlement. For the cities at the heart of metropolitan regions, nineteenth century built heritage became the locus for new investment and regeneration programmes. In older and smaller historic settlements, tourism developed and sub-regional roles, such as acting as dormitories for bigger cities, were reinforced. In the wake of the 2008 crash the biggest challenge facing the long-term management of historic centres of all types is public sector austerity and the diminished capacity of local authorities to strategically and effectively manage place.

In this paper, after briefly outlining the geography and governance arrangements of the UK, we describe the history in the UK for planning for the historic city and the way that heritage has been used increasingly instrumentally to achieve other economic and policy goals. The paper then focuses upon the core English cites outside London that lie at the centre of the principal conurbations, before discussing 'jewel cities', cities long known and celebrated for their historic character, with a focus upon York. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the role of heritage in different types of settlement and trajectories for the future.

Key words

Historic cities, conservation, York

1. Introduction

The heritage protection system in the UK is both extensive and, in principle, quite robust. Whilst concerns over historic character can be traced alongside the development of the modern planning movement from the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the late 1960s and early 1970s when conservation began to emerge as a central objective of planning processes, in part as a reaction against the modernist environments created in the years after 1945. The 1980s in particular saw the consolidation of national legislation and policy and its extension over many more buildings and areas. Thus conservation objectives became important in place-making, both through enhanced regulation but also because the market increasingly saw advantage in the place distinctiveness and quality that historic environments bring. We can see this effect in virtually all types of settlement. In metropolitan regions the core of industrial and commercial centres, with a built heritage that was often predominantly nineteenth century, was achieving new valorisation, and becoming the locus for new investment and regeneration programmes. In wider metropolitan regions older and smaller settlements became increasingly important locales through virtue of their historic environments. In key historic cities, such as York or Chester, long-established tourism grew rapidly in importance in local and regional economies. But equally in more modest market towns, regional sub-centres roles and their function as dormitories for dominant regional capitals was further developed. These trends, established in the 1980s, continued through the 1990s and into the 2000s. At the height of the property boom in the mid-2000s the sheer weight of development pressure began to challenge the centrality of conservation objectives in some cities, albeit these pressures were temporarily dissipated in the wake of the 2008 crash. Subsequently the biggest challenge facing the long-term management of historic centres of all types is public sector austerity and the diminished capacity of local authorities to strategically and effectively manage place.

In this paper we seek to explore these issues. We first briefly outline the geography and governance arrangements of the UK, with a focus upon England. The paper then goes on to describe the history in the UK for planning for the historic city and the way that conservation objectives became more central to planning and also the way that heritage was used increasingly instrumentally to achieve other economic and policy goals. The second half of the paper focuses upon more specific cases. First, the focus is upon the core of metropolitan regions and in particular upon the core English cites outside London that lie at the centre of the principal conurbations. A number of cases are discussed, with the principal focus upon Newcastle upon Tyne in the far north-east of England, peripheral from the economic and institutional heart of London. Discussion then shifts to 'jewel cities', cities long known and celebrated for their historic character. Here the focus is upon York, south of Newcastle but still in the north and east. Finally, the paper concludes with a brief discussion of the role of heritage in different types of settlement and trajectories for the future.

2. Settlement patterns and regional planning in the UK: a brief introduction

The United Kingdom, or more fully the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whilst a nation-state, is composed of four countries; England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each of the last three has a devolved administration to some degree, with the level of devolution varying considerably between countries and, particularly in the case of Scotland following its unsuccessful referendum on independence in 2014, in a state of some flux, but with a trend towards greater devolution. In the context of this paper the key issues are that, first, England is by far the most populous and economically dominant part of the UK and that, second, each country has a different planning regime, albeit with great similarities between them. For the purposes of practicality, the principal focus of this paper is upon England.

Within England (and indeed to a significant degree within the UK as a whole) London is an extremely dominant entity economically, politically and also through a whole infrastructure of other organisations such as national cultural institutions and so on. The pre-eminence of London has become steadily more significant as manufacturing has declined in its traditional heartlands of the north and as successive governments have pursued centralising policies and policies that advantage financial capital centred upon the City of London (Rodrik, 2009; Garretsen and Martin, 2010; Oxford Economics, 2011). Thus in England there is the dominant presence of London followed in terms of urban hierarchy by a series of cities, mainly to the north of the country, which historically grew around manufacturing in particular. The term 'core cities' is now used to refer to the main regional English cities; Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham and Sheffield. Most of these cities are the centre of larger conurbations that again tend to be predominantly industrial or post-industrial in character. The cities and their surrounding areas are representative of the major urban areas of England; major economic locations but also major repositories of heritage of the industrial era and indeed before. In particular Bristol, Liverpool and Newcastle have long histories of significance in British history that predates the main industrial era, due above all to the significance of their ports (Thurley, 2008).

Thus if we think about heritage in metropolitan regions in the UK we need to start by thinking of the regional centres themselves; whilst these cities might be primarily known as industrial or commercial centres they will often contain a significant legacy of historic buildings We then might think of the settlements that are particularly famous because of their historic environment or so-called 'jewel cities'. It is hard to be precise in listing these as there is no standard definition as such. But we might include cities still discernibly based upon a Roman or medieval plan (such as, on the one hand, Chester or Chichester and, on the other Norwich or York), ancient university cities (Oxford and

Cambridge), or a city such as Bath of ancient origin but famous for its classical buildings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of these cities, such as Norwich, are significant regional centres in their own right, a number are of at least sub-regional significance both in scale and in some cases due to an industrial history (York and Oxford). Even quite small cities such as Durham may retain a geographical importance as centres of administration, higher education and retailing. Furthermore, critically, if we take a more inclusive definition the number of historic towns and cities in England is extremely large and encompasses settlements of different types including, for example, market towns, small cathedral cities and resort towns. Thus, it becomes impossible to generalise about the role of historic cities in metropolitan regions as in different contexts historic cities are the metropolitan centre itself, in competition with the metropolitan centre, providing an ancillary specialist function within a metropolitan region, acting as dormitories or, indeed, geographically distant from any metropolitan agglomeration.

The situation is complicated further by the planning regime in England. Whilst planning is ultimately extremely centralised, with national governments setting policy and requiring locally-produced plans to conform to this policy, as the same time there has never been a national spatial plan as such. That having been said national policy ideas have emerged that have been extremely influential in the geographical shaping of metropolitan regions. Thus the idea of greenbelts, which date back to the early days of planning and formed an important part of post-war legislation (see below), have subsequently proved extremely durable on the whole and have been very important in keeping a degree of physical separation between settlements within metropolitan regions (see, Elson et al, 1993; Amati and Taylor, 2010).

Metropolitan local government authorities were created in 1974 and existed as a governance tier sitting above most of the core cities listed above, incorporating the other urban settlements in immediate proximity, which in the case of the most numerous, Greater Manchester, meant nine additional authorities, all of which were historically manufacturing centres in their own right. However, this level of governance was abolished in 1986 and though the counties remain as geographical entities, attempts at planning at a metropolitan or regional scale have been somewhat fragmented and unsatisfactory ever since. A Labour government did introduce Regional Assemblies in 1998 and Regional Spatial Strategies in 2004 but the first were abolished by Labour themselves (with powers transferring to non-elected regional development agencies) and the coalition government elected in 2010 (in office at the time of writing) abolished both the development agencies and the regional spatial strategies. Thus in practice most planning occurs at a local level within the framework of national policy. Any clear sense of regional direction or strategy is largely absent, although in the wake of the Scottish independence debate there are very tentative indicators this might become a live debate in England again. For example, it has been agreed that a Greater Manchester Combined Authority will be created with an elected Mayor (elected Mayors are relatively unusual in England).

3. **The history of historic city planning until the 1990s**

Provision for the planning and management of historic cores in the UK grew incrementally through the twentieth century, alongside the evolution of the planning system more generally. Conservation concerns over the loss of historic buildings in urban areas grew during the inter-war period of the 1920s and 1930s with, for example, the loss of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Georgian architecture in London being a particular concern. Comprehensive planning, however, came with the post-war planning acts – specifically the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947. At a similar period there developed the first significant body of plans for British urban cores. Plans were undertaken or commissioned whilst the war was still in progress or in its immediate aftermath for a

wide variety of settlement types. Whilst a wide spectrum of approaches is evident, it is clear that most of the large metropolitan centres were not at this time considered 'historic' and thus did not demand a conservation-orientated approach – perhaps the two main exceptions were the capital cities of London, location of many of the early conservation *cause celebres*, and Edinburgh. Thus plans for cities such as Manchester and Newcastle upon Tyne emphasised comprehensive redevelopment, almost to the degree of *tabula rasa.* However, for smaller and older centres, such as cathedral cities, a clear sense of their historicity is evident. Interventions proposed or made were still drastic and radical looked at with hindsight today, but these were intended to be a 'balanced approach', combining the protection of historic character with necessary modernization (Larkham, 2003, Pendlebury, 2003).

In practice the economic deprivations of post-war austerity meant that in most cities relatively little central area development occurred until the 1960s, apart from those places with significant bomb damage. However, towards the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s the momentum in favour of redevelopment of central areas grew rapidly. As the consequences of redevelopment in city centres became apparent so opposition to the demolition of buildings grew. As public concerns about the transformation of urban areas developed, so did an official concern for area conservation. A significant milestone in the development of national official thinking about the planning of historic cities was four demonstration studies jointly commissioned by central government and the relevant local authority for Bath, Chester, Chichester and York (Delafons 1997); the study for York was perhaps the most forward looking in terms of a sophisticated and integrated approach to the management of the historic city and the study has remained a benchmark in the city (Pendlebury, 2005). This was followed by the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, which created the national system of conservation areas.

Thus by the early 1970s the principal legal instruments of heritage protection still in use today had been established. However, conservation objectives frequently collided with projects proposing major urban intervention. In Bath, perhaps more than any other British city, there was a fierce backlash over the planning and management of the city. Central to these critiques was the idea that the more modest Georgian heritage had been undervalued (see for example, Amery & Cruikshank 1975, Fergusson 1973). Conservation of the historic city, it was argued, should not just be about the major set-pieces but about understanding places as a total historic system. By the time of the celebratory 1975 European Architectural Heritage Year, conservation was enjoying a far more central position in the planning system than had been the case a few years before. In part this was due to the external pressures and engagement in local development struggles from an active conservation movement. But there were also changes in the heart and culture within both the professional and political parts of local authorities as faith was lost in the modernist schemes they had been promoting. Furthermore, this policy shift was also the result of the economic crises of the period that led to a property crash, and, as in the 1940s, made large schemes of road or property development unrealistic.

The election of a Conservative government in May 1979 brought a new enthusiasm for heritage (see for example Hewison, 1987), which within the planning system translated to a new support for conservation policy, in a period of more general hostility to the idea of state-planning (Allmendinger and Thomas 1998, Thornley 1991). Whilst the overarching framework of legislation remained stable, quite dramatic changes occurred in the amount of the historic environment that was protected and the policy framework that was applied to it. The number of listed buildings increased enormously in the 1980s and early 1990s and similarly, numbers of conservation areas, designated by local authorities, escalated rapidly throughout the 1980s and 1990s, while many existing areas were extended. However, whilst it was in this period that the conservation of the historic environment became firmly embedded as a central objective of the town planning system, new challenges and

spheres of contestation arose. This growth of heritage was accompanied by a repositioning of the built heritage to assume economically more instrumental roles through either state-led efforts of regeneration or market-led appropriations of heritage for new economic uses. The heritage sector was generally complicit in these changes, albeit conflict occurred over what this might mean in practice.

Conservation lobby groups were directly linking to the emergent urban policy of regeneration as they sought to demonstrate the economic sense of a conservation approach (for example, SAVE Britain's Heritage 1978) and examples of this process were becoming evident. The Covent Garden area, slated for demolition by the Greater London Council a few years before, became a festival market place-type shopping arena. Saved from wholesale clearance by community activism, the area was steadily gentrified, as investors realised its potential. The UK economy was undergoing dramatic restructuring at this time and many manufacturing jobs were lost in this period. De-industrialisation stripped away traditional industrial bases and many cities were left with little option but to attempt a radical re-invention of themselves, often seeking to use heritage and culture more broadly as part of place-marketing and the promotion of inward investment. Those towns and cities, whose fortunes had been built on the rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth century were particularly badly affected.

Perhaps the exemplar of heritage being positioned at the front of regeneration programmes in the 1980s in this way was the restoration and reuse of Albert Dock, a large complex of Grade 1 listed warehouses in Liverpool, which became the regeneration flagship of the Merseyside Development Corporation. This combined the physical regeneration of superb quality industrial buildings with a focus on culture; Albert Dock hosts both a maritime museum and an outpost of the Tate gallery (Pendlebury 2009). A key body in subsequently mediating and promoting this agenda has been English Heritage, for example through promoting the idea of the 'heritage dividend' through a series of publications (English Heritage 1999), a continuing process of more thorough documentation of the economic impact of heritage-spending.

Thus in the UK, as well as conservation being seen as a force for continuity – balanced against forces for change – it has been presented as an *active agent* of change in itself. The concept of change has been decoupled from physical change, or at least it no longer tends to be associated with the erasure of existing physical environments and their replacement with new. Increasingly the discourse has become that necessary change can be achieved, and indeed enhanced, by conserving and recycling historic buildings in ways compatible with conservation objectives. This became particularly strongly articulated in the relationship between conservation and regeneration initiatives that focused on the physical environment (Pendlebury 2002). This is something that came about through an active, recurrent positioning of conservation-planning within the wider planning and regeneration system.

However, as the market discovered the economic potential latent in recycling historic buildings, it sought to do so on its own terms. As Gregory Ashworth has described, conservation developed two paradigms; one based around a traditional culturally-based conservation-value set and the other an explicit commodification – the use of the past as a saleable product (Ashworth 1997). Thus whilst local planning authorities across the country were seeking to strengthen and formalise their conservation policies, one of the severest tests of the new found emphasis on conservation policy objectives came from developers, in economically buoyant commercial locations (see Larkham and Barrett, 1998 and Punter, 1991). Conflict shifted from struggles over the total demolition of listed buildings to the degree of permissible intervention into historic fabric, as pressure for alterations became applied to historic interiors in particular. The contradictory policy goals of central government, which emphasised both the importance of market liberalisation and the historic

environment, were often resolved through façadism – the retention of a historic façade or façades and the redevelopment of a building interior. Developers often promoted such schemes, playing lip-service to conservation objectives whilst achieving the commercial space they wanted.

4. **The historic metropolitan core**

This shift towards a more instrumental understanding of conservation with potential to contribute towards growth and to help in the regeneration of places was also been felt in cities not historically noted for their architectural heritage, including the core cities referred to above. By the 1980s all these cities had embraced the conservationist turn to a greater or lesser degree, in ways reflecting their particular legacies of historic environments and particular planning and development cultures. By and large, schemes of large-scale public sector intervention had disappeared and the focus was on managing private-sector investment; trying to strike a balance between investment and sustaining heritage. However, as discussed, the 1980s saw the development of a new trend; the idea that historic building stock could be a positive asset in achieving regeneration in cities that were desperately trying to restructure their economies and achieve physical regeneration. The main focus on this potential was on edge-of-centre economically marginal locations, typically old commercial or industrial areas that had a legacy of high quality buildings combined with high vacancy rates of land and property, resulting from rapid deindustrialisation. The Albert Dock regeneration example mentioned above was a high profile example of a much wider trend. For example, the Castlefield area in central Manchester was designated a conservation area in 1979 and in 1983 Castlefield was labelled an 'Urban Heritage Park', as the economic development potential of the area was realised and specifically the possibility of using the area's largely derelict heritage to develop tourism. This strategy was extremely successful and acted as a catalyst for regeneration more generally in this part of Manchester (Tiesdell et al. 1996). Kelham Island in Sheffield, the Lace Market in Nottingham and the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham are examples of other edge-of-centre districts where similar strategies were employed.

In the 1990s the potential of heritage to be a positive force in economic regeneration was increasingly established and was evident in large-scale city centre initiatives. New Labour governments (from 1997) coined the term 'Urban Renaissance' (Urban Task Force, 1999) into a regeneration doctrine which asserted that intensive public investment in core areas would stimulate sustainable economic growth and social inclusion through employment. This assumption was backed up by the presence of generous UK and European funding streams. A number of conservation initiatives benefited from this unprecedented inflow of public funds and private capital to historic urban cores. Although Urban Renaissance policy frameworks embraced a very broad range of issues the physical regeneration approach "was rooted in the Anglo-Saxon planning culture of last centuries, from the City Beautiful movement of late1800s to the Townscape Movement of the 1960s, and focused on remaking the appearance and visual enjoyment of the urban scene" (Vescovi, 2013: 158). The 'Urban Renaissance' agenda was grounded in the expected synergies of conservation of built and natural heritage, top-end architectural design, improvements to public realm, erection of flagship public arts establishments and other culture-led strategies (DETR, 2000; PwC, 2009).

The 'Renaissance' of historic urban cores, by turning them into loci of cultural habitation and bundling physical regeneration with advertising strategies, was a part of a wider political agenda of the New Labour government of that period. Regeneration initiatives, in the cores of post-industrial cities in particular, were intended to stimulate economic growth in the North of England, and thus rebalance both national economy and demographics by making the North contribute to the UK's economy and secure jobs for local populations. Furthermore, the 'heritage map' was very significant

in shaping the evolution of city centres in each of the core cities (Pendlebury and Strange, 2011). In some cities this was not especially contentious. For example, in Nottingham, Tim Heath (2010) described how a long-term regeneration strategy successfully integrated historic buildings within a wider programme of improvement in the city centre. However, the developing potential for conflict between heritage status and other goals was seen in other cities. Economic success in the decade prior to 2008 in some places engendered intense development pressures, with consequent pressure on heritage assets, and to revived forms of building often considered incompatible with sustaining the historic qualities of historic cities – in particular building tall. There was a developing clash between conservation and development interests, although it is not a reversion to the battles of the 1970s. By and large listed buildings usually remain sacrosanct in schemes of urban development. Rather, the battle was concerned with a more diffuse sense of the character of the city and tall buildings are a dramatic exemplar of this. Thus discussions of Birmingham (Holyoak, 2010) and Sheffield (Booth, 2010) both described, on the one hand, heritage being utilised within regeneration schemes but on the other non-protected heritage being effaced and the wider character of the city being compromised. Such struggles illustrate a broader process of refocusing of conservation activity from a preservation act towards a vehicle of economic development (Delafons, 1997) whereby more pragmatic and opportunistic approaches to commodified heritage assets prevail over strategic thinking (Strange and Whitney, 2003).

These issues have perhaps been thrown into sharpest relief in Liverpool and Manchester. In Liverpool the potential to assist regeneration was at the heart of the successful 2004 bid for Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site (Pendlebury et. al. 2009). The site encompasses the waterfront and the main commercial core of the city and a buffer zone includes much of the rest of the centre. From inscription in 2004, the WHS had something of a difficult history with constant negotiation between the state and extra-state authorities of UNESCO/ ICOMOS about the nature of its integrity and how this might be managed. These difficulties have now reached crisis point, as following approval of the Liverpool Waters proposal (a huge waterfront redevelopment scheme), the WHS has been put on UNESCO's 'danger list'.

In Manchester Michael Hebbert (2010) argued that the city authorities have had a consistent ambivalence to the city's heritage and that the Council has been characterised by a strongly entrepreneurial approach. After initial scepticism over conserving the Castlefield area the economic potential of a heritage-based approach was realised in the 1980s. In the 1990s heritage continued to appear as a comparative advantage in the regeneration of the inner city, as creative developers such as *Urban Splash* stimulated new markets by recycling the city's rich legacy of commercial and industrial buildings. However, Hebbert argued that as land prices escalated after 2000, pressure developed for new forms of development less complementary to the city's existing building stock, and specifically the demand to build tall. The City Council took a very permissive approach to such proposals. This is exemplified by the now constructed Beetham Tower.

One of the most well-known examples of such regeneration initiatives was the Grainger Town Project in Newcastle upon Tyne. This emerged from conservation-led concerns over the under-occupancy and poor condition of buildings in the central city, many of which were listed. It developed into a pioneering partnership, which brought city centres into mainstream regeneration practice and funding and attracted support from national agencies such as English Partnerships, historically not involved in such activity. The arms-length agency created presented the heritage within its boundary, 'Grainger Town', as a comparative advantage, adding value through its quality and place-distinctiveness. The Grainger Town Partnership, with some luck in working in a period of extremely favourable property-market conditions, was very successful in many respects, revitalising the city centre, recycling buildings, improving the public realm and facilitating the development of a new central residential community, although in practice significant tensions existed between the

various stakeholders (Pendlebury, 2002; Robinson, 2003; INHERIT, 2007; Robinson and Zass-Ogilvie, 2010).

The post 2008 period has brought new challenges for many of the core cities. In Newcastle, a northern post-industrial city, distant from the economic hub of London, there has been a major loss of market confidence in investment. Even in the regenerated Grainger Town area there remains significant problems of building underuse and disrepair. Schemes of redevelopment have been shelved or are proceeding on a more limited basis. This is most pronounced in some of the sectors of the economy that were booming during the earlier part of the 2000s, such as retailing. There are a few buoyant investment sectors, such as student housing, as British universities, now largely removed from public-sector funding restrictions, continue to expand.

More profound in consequence, however, than loss of investor confidence is the public-sector austerity measures implemented by the Coalition Government after 2010. Designed as much as a systemic and permanent reduction in the scale and the operation of the local state, as to reduce the national debt, many local authorities have been profoundly affected and further cuts are yet to come. This is particularly severe in consequence in those cases where local authorities receive much of their funding from central government subventions and where the public sector is a significant part of the local economy. Both of these apply in Newcastle, which has, to give one example, had to withdraw most of its funding from libraries with multiple closures ensuing. Within this context there has been a significant loss of staff and skills within planning, albeit with limited direct impact thus far on the Urban Design and Conservation team. This loss of skill base has profound consequences for the long-term management of the city the consequences of which will take many years to play out. The capacity of the local planning authority to take a strategic view of the city and to monitor the quality of development proposals has been severely compromised for the foreseeable future, with further cuts to come (English Heritage, 2012 and 2013; IHBC, 2013; Country Land and Business Association, 2011). In Newcastle, this situation is exacerbated by the lack of strong Newcastle-specific civic groups to step into the breach of any gap left, compared, for example to the York example below.

Even within this very constrained context there are, however, examples of the positive management of the historic environment. So, for example, Newcastle City Council has been successful in creating a cocktail of capital, with the principal sum coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), to implement the 'Old Newcastle' project that is delivering a significantly enhanced visitor experience to the remains of the castle (that gives the city its name) and to the immediate environs. This includes, for example, a heritage-led education and interpretation centre in the vacant Black Gate, a redundant grade I listed building and Scheduled Ancient Monument. Elsewhere in the city centre the private company that runs the business-funded Business Improvement District, NE1 (2013), is proposing schemes of pedestrianisation

John Punter is correct when he referred to 'the failure to keep urban conservation at the forefront of quality place-making', an agenda which has been focused on issues such as liveability, transport and the public realm, but more questionable was his assertion over 'the declining power of conservation designations' (Punter,2010; 369). Although in some core cities we can see tensions over how contemporary development relates to the historic form and qualities of those places, we also observe that statutory protection mechanisms, especially listed buildings, have usually retained their hard-won strongly protected status that developers generally work around or with. The heritage map has been used positively to encourage investment; presented as a comparative advantage in creating place quality as public authorities and the market have found that historic buildings can add value as part of the development process. Yet it is also clear it is a significant shaping force that can restrict and push other forms of investment towards particular geographical destinations. What is

less clear is the long-term impact of public sector austerity and the reduction of the local state. Local authorities simply do not have the same capacity to plan for their city centres nor to regulate changes with the levels of scrutiny that would traditionally have been at their disposal. The full implications of this for the historic environment and for, in turn, the viability of historic centres will only become evident over the long term.

5. 'Jewel cities': the case of York

By the early 1990s the conservation success stories of historic jewel cities such as Chester, York, Bath, and Canterbury had placed them at the forefront of conservation practice and debate. Their success in maintaining the historical integrity of their historic cores over the course of the 1970s had, however, left them facing a number of key planning and development pressures: how to continue to maintain their historic centres, how to cope with increasing demands for development, how to cope with growing visitor numbers, and how to avoid the over consumption of their conserved historic assets? These pressures have represented major planning challenges for historic gem cities since the 1980s, not least because the economies of these cities has become closely associated with the continued economic exploitation of their historic character with the consequence that most planning and development decisions are framed within a context of local historicity as an economic resource. Questions arise about how to use the historic fabric of the city to continue growth and development and to mitigate its excesses. For many of these cities the financial crash was effectively a brief pause in this process and concerns are once more focused on the pressure for development and growth.

Concerns about development pressure and potential urban expansions of cathedral cities and historic towns, especially in relation to their wider landscape setting, led in 2014 to English Heritage commissioning a study, '*The Sustainable Growth of Cathedral Cities and Historic Towns*' (Green Balance & Burton-Pye, 2014). The study first considered land allocations for housing and other development across fifty settlements (up to a maximum population size of 160,000). In practice the study found that no evidence of a widespread issue of large land allocations endangering historic city character, albeit with a few notable exceptions where significant development was anticipated. There was no discernible geographical pattern to variations in anticipated growth. The study then considered how a smaller number of settlements were seeking to manage development pressures in practice, finding considerable variation in the cultural approach of local politicians, essentially over how much the conservation of cultural heritage was seen as an economic asset or a barrier to growth.

One larger historic city that has been juggling these questions for decades is York. Although south of Newcastle, York is also in the north if England. Geographically and economically it sits in a complex relationship with the large urban conurbation of West Yorkshire and the city of Leeds in particular. So, for example, commuting occurs in both directions and whilst Leeds is the larger, economically-dominant city, it is York that sits in a critical position on the national rail work. York also has its own history of industrialisation, particularly in chocolate manufacture, although this industrial base is much diminished from its peak.

York has a population of c. 200,000. The significance of its heritage can be gauged by its aspirations to World Heritage Site status (anecdotally, it might have been nominated in the 1980s but withdrew from the process for fear it would inhibit economic development). Of Roman origin, York's historic urban core is a palimpsest of Roman, Anglo-Scandinavian, medieval and post-medieval settlements well defined by very well preserved medieval city walls that now serve as elevated pathways. York is one of the richest cities in terms of its architectural history and also contains major tourist destinations,

such as, York Minster, the National Railway Museum and Jorvik Viking Centre; “The city as a whole is a mirror of British history and architecture. It is a special community whose evolution is exceptionally well recorded. It is a city whose future wealth is likely to be built successfully on these assets. As a special place, York needs special care…” (Cooke, 2006, p. 4).

York has been a major focus of conservationist concern since at least the middle of the twentieth century. One manifestation of this, in contrast to Newcastle, is a highly developed range of non-state organisations devoting to protecting the history and heritage of the city, including the long-established city-level organisations York Civic Trust, York Conservation Trust, York Archaeological Trust and York Georgian Society as well as neighbourhood-level organisations and more short-lived campaigning groups. These bodies take an active part in place-shaping, both through strong involvement in the planning process and through acquisition of historical assets, direct conservation practices and property management. The 1968 Esher Study city for the city was a benchmark in developing national conservation practice, a key document in heralding a new integrated planning approach to heritage matters (Esher 1968, Pendlebury 2005). In the wake of this strategy and subsequent development struggles in the 1970s over new road construction in particular, York became one of the most progressive places for introducing a thorough planning programme which sought to both take care of the architectural heritage and to improve the environmental quality and vitality of the historic core. So, for example, the late-1970s through to the 1990s saw wide implementation of a programme of pedestrianisation, or ‘foot streets’, as well as the introduction of significant amounts of housing in parts of the city previously occupied by low grade industrial uses. More recent policy developments have included a major urban design/ economic development strategy ‘New City Beautiful’ (CYC, 2010) and a comprehensive character appraisal (CYC, 2011 and 2013a), which explicitly acknowledge and seek to progress the legacy of Esher. In principle at least, the city recognises its “heritage capital is one of the central pillars of York’s attractiveness and a major contributing factor to its economic competitiveness” (GVA Grimley LLP, 2008, p. 37), although in reality the political wish for development inevitably exists in some tension with an emphasis on protecting architectural heritage.

In the post-2008 period, the qualities of the historic urban core have helped make the city more resilient to the economic crisis. Unlike most cities in the north of England, York to a large extent evaded the consequences of the economic downturn. The 2013 Local Plan states, “York is in good shape, with a strongly performing modern and mixed economy. The city continues to attract investment and has major development opportunities in the pipeline and a strong market economy” (CYC, 2013b, p. 7). Part of this success is directly related to the city’s heritage. So, for example, international tourism to the UK has been boosted by a weak currency and more than 7 million visitors arrive in York each year. Less easy to document, but evidently the case, is the way the quality of York’s environment helps a deeper resilience, as it remains an attractive place to live and invest in, especially given its excellent rail connections.

Thus whilst a city such as Newcastle has in recent years only seen investment in very specific markets, development pressure in York, after a brief pause post-2008, continues in a range of sectors. So, for example, as with Newcastle, the universities in York continue to expand, along with the demand for student housing. Indeed, housing more generally is a critical issue in York, with significant pressure for urban expansion that has brought conflict with civil organisations such as the York Civic Trust. Unlike Newcastle, and unusually in the UK, pressure for additional retail space has also been an issue, albeit a contentious one. In 2013 long negotiations between LaSalle UK Ventures Fund and the City of York Council over a large new retail-led scheme in the Castle - Piccadilly area of the historic core (known as Coppergate 2, following an earlier Coppergate scheme in the 1980s) failed on the grounds of scale of development, poor architectural design and adverse impacts on historic assets. Furthermore, the failure of negotiations over Coppergate 2 opened up the possibility of going ahead with an equally contentious competitive scheme – a 500,000 sq. feet extension of the out of town Monks Cross Shopping Mall. After two planning applications for the extension of Monks Cross were refused, a third,

linked to the provision of a community stadium, was approved, risking loss of trade in the city centre and making the city even more dependent on the tourism industry.

Again, compared to Newcastle, the impact of public sector austerity, whilst significant, has been less severe overall in York. However, specialist conservation posts have fallen from 5 to 2.5 members. These reductions, along with cuts in planning and other departments, put into question the city's capability to manage urban development. In the face of growing development pressures these losses of professional expertise contribute to the weakening of the Council's bargaining power in future negotiations with investors, which puts the city at risk of both losing out on some development opportunities and compromising the quality of the historic environment through fast-track approval of other ones. This, in turn, may seriously hamper the governance of cultural heritage, economic growth and societal well-being for many years to come. That said, both the City Council and local civic organisations, that increasingly shape the planning process in the absence of planning officers, are still putting into motion a number of innovative governance and management practices that are of benefit to the historic urban core.

So, for example, since 2013, the City Council has used grants available from the Department for Transport and recently devolved elements of transportation funding to move forward the legacy of 'Urban Renaissance'. While generous regeneration schemes from the late 1990s and early 2000s were depleted and discontinued after 2008, local authorities across the UK have access to funding designated to transport improvements, in particular those that promote sustainable mobility. The Council's recent Reinvigorate York Project, that puts into motion *Streetscapes Strategy and Guidance* (CYC, 2013c), builds on synergies between removal and reduction of car traffic in parts of the walled city, and improvements to the public realm and landscaping. The philosophy of the project dwells on a vision of the city as a network of public spaces connected by pedestrianised routes and 'shared slow traffic spaces' used by privileged vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. These improvements, that embrace quality streetscaping and injection of artisan street furniture, link back to the *New City Beautiful*'s economic thinking where footstreets not only link distinct historic selling points but also become selling points themselves.

Issues of housing supply and affordability have reinvigorated York's longstanding efforts to increase the central residential population. York's attempts to repopulate the historic urban core date back to a recommendation of Esher's 1968 study that resulted in removal of some industry from the walled city and delivery of a historicizing estate of low rise city centre homes within the bounds of the medieval network of streets (Pendlebury, 2005). Since then the city has emphasized the potential for the reuse of vacant upper floors. While the efforts to repopulate vacant upper floors, known also as Living Over the Shop (LOTS) initiatives, have been experimented with and undertaken in a number of English cities, most of them have achieved limited results. Due to technical difficulties, high costs of conversions, ownership questions, undersupply of schools and other facilities in city centres and a weak demand for city centre living, the economic rationale behind LOTS remained quite weak. However, the recent shortage of affordable homes coupled with city's growing population and rising house prices have given LOTS a new impetus. They also present a win-win strategy for preserving historical assets, delivering a lively city centre and meeting social needs (NECT 2013).

Finally, the management of Council's own land assets and purchasing power can have a significant impact. For example, in 2008 the City of York Council announced that they would relocate their dispersed offices to a new location on the Hungate site to the east of the city centre. However, the new build scheme they proposed met opposition from English Heritage on heritage grounds. In response, the Council proposed another scheme – West Offices –which involved the conversion of a redundant historic train station. This not only showcased responsible place governance and the responsiveness of the Council to conservation concerns, but also serves as an example of a low-key

inner city heritage regeneration. West Offices have enlivened local businesses around the old station, attracted a new scheme for a 5-star hotel and will help to consolidate a development cluster in the area.

6. Conclusion

After briefly reviewing the history of planning for historic towns and cities this paper has focused on the central role heritage assumed in place-making in more recent decades. Broadly speaking, we have considered two types of settlement. First, the metropolitan cores, the built fabric of which is generally substantially nineteenth century. Here a consideration of such places as historic is relatively recent, but since the 1980s has been actively mobilised in the reinvention and regeneration of cities that suffered though deindustrialisation and the loss of their traditional economic base. Heritage has been used to re-image and sell new conceptions of place. Second, we considered smaller historic cities (with a focus on York) where heritage has a much longer history of being considered a key urban asset. There have long been pressures on heritage as a result of development pressures generated by a strong local economy and there is also typically a well-developed civic amenity presence, developed to argue for the protection of historic qualities, compared to the larger metropolitan heartlands. These cities exist in complex and highly variable dynamics within the wider metropolitan regions within which they sit, but generally have an economic and geographical importance related to commuting patterns, leisure and tourism visits, specialist retailing, administrative functions and so on.

Development was booming in both types of settlement in the 2000s until the crash of 2008. Whilst a comprehensive overview of what has happened subsequently is difficult it does seem that the older, smaller historic settlements have fared surprisingly well. A city such as York, located in the north of the country, albeit with very good rail connections, seems little troubled by the economic downturn that has had a severe effect on other northern cities. In part this seems related to the nature of the local economy – tourism has not experienced a significant downturn for example – but also perhaps to a deeper resilience that derives from the city's physical attractiveness, which in turn derives from its historic environment. In contrast, a city such as Newcastle, though it has a significant historic environment, seems to have been much harder hit, with investment confined to particular niche development sectors and with problems of vacancy and property deterioration.

Where cities of all types have been affected, albeit variably, is through public sector austerity measures. Newcastle as an authority has been very badly affected, York less so, although it is noticeable that in both cities we can see creative and innovate heritage projects aimed at enhancing place and the local economy are still managing to proceed. However, there are longer term troubling questions here. The evidence we have suggests that a well-managed historic environment is good for the long-term well-being and resilience of places. Whilst there might be to a degree a collective knowledge and understanding of this, in practice it requires oversight; it requires governance and management as individual investors will always seek to develop projects that are inimical to the historic qualities of place. Recession tempts decision-makers to accept poor quality development, but more profoundly the loss of capacity and skills in the local state diminishes the capacity to successful manage places in the longer term.

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